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Esau the Ancestor of Rome

In the Bible, Esau is the ancestor of the Edomites who live on Mount Seir, southwest of Judah. So how did the rabbis come to associate Esau and Edom with Rome? Two main factors are at work here: Christianity and Herod.

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Esau reconciles with Jacob (detail), *Die Bibel in Bildern* 1860 Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

Esau and Jacob: Sibling Rivalry

The Torah describes how Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, battle each other in their mother's womb:

בראשית כה:כב וַיִּתְרָצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקֶרֶבָהּ... כה:כג וַיֹּאמֶר יְ-הוָה לָהּ שְׁנֵי (גִּיּוֹם) [גִּיּוֹם] בְּבֶטֶןךָ וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדוּ וְלֹאִם מְלֹאִם יֶאֱמָץ וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר.

Gen 25:22 The children struggled in her womb... 25:23 and YHWH said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, two separate peoples shall issue from your body; one people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."

This battle in the womb continues through their birth:

כה:כד וַיִּמָּלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לֵלֶדֶת וְהָיָה תוֹמָם בְּבֶטֶנָהּ. כה:כה וַיֵּצֵא הָרֹאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוֹנִי כָּלֹ כְּאֶדְרֶת שֵׁשֶׁר וַיִּקְרָאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו. כה:כו וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן יָצָא אָחִיו וַיְדוּ אֶחָזֶת בְּעֵקֶב עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב...

25:24 When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. 25:25 The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over, and

they named him Esau. ^{25:26} Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau, and they named him Jacob...

As Jacob and Esau grow up, their competition continues. Esau is a hunter while Jacob is a tent-dweller, and one day, when Esau returns from a hunt, Jacob convinces his exhausted brother to sell him his birthright for a pot of stew. In a later story, Jacob finally overtakes his older twin, when he tricks their elderly, blind father Isaac into blessing him with Esau's blessing (27:29).

This leaves Esau with the "blessing" of subservience to his younger brother (27:40). Esau is furious at his brother's trick, and Jacob runs away to Haran to escape Esau's wrath. When Jacob returns twenty years later, the brothers reconcile (Gen 33). Even so, in the end, the brothers go their separate ways, with Jacob staying in Canaan and Esau moving to Seir, in the southern Transjordan:

וַיִּקַּח עֵשָׂו אֶת נָשָׁיו וְאֶת בָּנָיו וְאֶת בְּנֹתָיו וְאֶת כָּל נַפְשׁוֹת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת
מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת כָּל בְּהֶמְתּוֹ וְאֶת כָּל קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל אֶרֶץ
מִדְּבָר אֶדְוִם. וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵשָׂו בְּהַר שֵׁעִיר עֵשָׂו הוּא אֶדְוִם.^{לז:ח}

Gen 36:6 Esau took his wives, his sons and daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle and all his livestock, and all the property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan and went to another land because of his brother Jacob.... ^{36:8}

So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir—Esau being Edom.

Although the texts about Jacob and Esau are ostensibly speaking about individuals, each brother represents an ethnic and/or political group that resided in the Levant in biblical times. The physical description of Esau, as red (*adom*) and covered in hair (*se'ar*) foreshadows his future as the founder of the Edomites who live near Mount Seir.^[1]

Israel and Edom: The Historical Connection

The biblical text explains that the two groups, Israel (=Jacob) and Edom (=Esau), are "brothers." The Edomites are the older group, which the Bible confirms in a number of texts that describe Edom having a kingdom before the Israelites do (Gen 36:31-39, Num 20:14-21, Deut 2:2-8). Nevertheless, Israel will rule over Edom; this occurs with David's conquest (2 Sam 8:14, 1 Kgs 11:15-16) and lasts until Edom rebelled and won independence during the reign of King Jehoram of Judah (2 Kgs 8:20-22).

Judea and Idumea in Second Temple Times

After the destruction of Judah in 586, the Edomites, who sided with the Babylonians in their conquest (Ps 137:7), expanded their territorial holdings westward, all the way to Ashkelon, settling in much of what was once southern Judah (including Hebron).^[2] When the Judahites began to return in the late 6th century B.C.E., the Edomites were entrenched in the south and antagonism between the groups was heated.

Centuries later, when the Maccabees rebelled against the Syrian Greeks in 167 B.C.E., the Judeans also took their fight to the Idumeans (1 Macc. 5:65; NETS with adjustments):

And Judah and his brothers went out and made war on the sons of Esau in the land to the south. And he struck Hebron and its daughters and tore down its fortresses and burned the towers all around it.

After the establishment of Judea as an independent polity, the Hasmonean high priest John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.E.) conquered the Idumeans and forced them to convert to Judaism (Josephus, *Ant.* 13:9). Thus, for the second time, Jacob ruled Esau.

Edom and Rome

This basic sketch of the relationship between the polities of Israel/Judah/Judea and Edom/Idumea during the biblical and Second Temple periods indicates that Edom was a polity that ruled from the Mount Seir area, from Wadi al-Hasa (south-east of the Dead Sea) in modern day Jordan and southward, eventually extending westward to Ashkelon on the Mediterranean Coast, and northward up to Hebron, in the Second Temple period.

And yet, Rabbinic midrash associates Esau and Edom with a completely different geographical area—the city of Rome in the Italian Peninsula—and speaks as if Romans are all Edomites. How did this develop? I believe that the two main factors were at work here: Christianity and Herod.

To understand the development of this rabbinic interpretation of Esau and Edom, we need to look at a parallel process of allegorizing Esau which begins with the Jewish, Christ-believing homileticist, Paul of Tarsus (ca. 5-64/67 C.E.).

Early Christian Readings of the Jacob-Esau Metaphor

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul reminds his readers that God chose Isaac and not Ishmael among Abraham's sons, because Isaac

was “the child of the promise” and not just a child of the flesh.^[3] Already in his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul characterized his opponents as Ishmael, a point implied at the beginning of Romans 9 as well. After describing how God chose Isaac, Paul writes that God similarly chose Jacob (Romans 9:10–13, NRSV),

...when she (=Rebekah) had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad—so that God’s purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call—she was told (Gen 25:23), “The elder shall serve the younger.” As it is written (Mal 1:3), “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.”

By tying the choice of Jacob to the choice of Isaac, Paul implies—but does not state outright—that his followers should be identified with Jacob and his opponents should be identified with Esau.

Epistle of Barnabas

A few decades after Paul, in the late first or early second century C.E., the author of the pseudonymous letter known as the *Epistle of Barnabas* (a work that was considered canonical by some sects of Christianity), uses the prophecy about Rebekah’s two sons as a reference to contemporary groups (*Barnabas* 13:1–3, Holmes ed.):

But let us see if this people (=Jews) is the heir, or the former (=Jesus followers), and if the covenant belongs to us or to them. Hear ye now what the Scripture saith concerning the people. Isaac prayed for Rebecca his wife, because she was barren; and she conceived. Furthermore also, Rebecca went forth to inquire of the Lord; and the Lord said to her, “Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples in thy belly; and the one people shall surpass the other, and the elder shall serve the younger.” You ought to understand who was Isaac, who Rebecca, and concerning what persons He declared that this people should be greater than that.

Here, Barnabas implies that Jesus followers, the younger group, are Jacob, whereas the Jews, the older group, are Esau. This contrasts sharply with Paul, for whom the main distinction between Esau and Jacob was between types of Christ followers, his group versus that of his opponents in Jerusalem. It would never have occurred to Paul to exclude Jews from Jacob as Barnabas does. This difference is best explained by the post-Paul history of the Christ believing group, which was composed largely of non-Jews, and often identified the Jews as the Other.

Tertullian’s Against the Jews

The first Church Father to state explicitly that Jacob symbolizes the Church and Esau the Jews is Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 240 CE) of Carthage, often described as “the father of Latin Christianity.” Tertullian argues that God’s prophecy to Rebecca that “the greater shall serve the younger” refers to the older nation of Jews, who will one day serve the younger nation of Christians (*Against the Jews* 1).^[4]

He writes that God promised,

[T]hat from Rebekah’s womb two peoples and two clans were about to come forth. They are, of course, the Jews—that is, Israel—and that Gentiles—that is, us.... For indeed, God designed two peoples and two clans to come forth from the womb of one woman, not to separate grace on the basis of the name but on the order of the birth, such that the one who would come forth from the womb first would be subjected to the younger—that is, the later....

And so, although the people or clan of the Jews is anterior in time and older, graced with the first honour in relation to the law, ours is understood accurately as younger in the ages of time. This is so, as in the final lap of our age we have grasped the notion of divine compassion. Without doubt, according to the decree of the divine utterance, **the first, the elder people, namely the Jewish, inevitably will serve the younger. The younger people, namely the Christian, will rise above the elder...**

- Subversão lógica natural.
Jamais o velho vai servir ao jovem.
Será o jovem que simbolicamente vai servir ao velho por sua sabedoria e instrução.

A verdade: Roma vai servir aos judeus. O maior e mais avançado império jamais visto vai abandonar o Trivium, monopolizar os conhecimentos antigos e massificar adotando culturalmente uma tradição de histórias judaicas completamente ridículas para interpretar a realidade de forma simbólica

A verdadeira história é subvertida com a história ridícula de que gregos e romanos são descendentes de Edom. Eles são simbolicamente. Pois vão servir aos judeus com o cristianismo. Os cristãos que seriam I

In fact, our people—that is the later—having forsaken the idols to which previously we used to be devoted, were converted to the same God from whom Israel departed... For thus the younger people—that is, the later—rose above the older people while it was obtaining the grace of divine honour from which Israel has been divorced.^[5]

This new approach would give way to a pattern of Church writings which read the patriarchal narratives and biblical prophecies Christologically, assuming that the annulment of the covenant with Israel and the establishment of a new covenant with Christians was part of the original divine plan, and that Christians embodied the true people of Israel.

The Voice of Jacob and the Arms of Esau

Naturally, the rabbis consider Jacob to be the ancestor of the Jews. But instead of saying that Esau is the ancestor of Christianity, they describe him as the ancestor of Rome. The earliest example of this connection in rabbinic literature appears in the Jerusalem Talmud (4th/5th century C.E.), glossing the scene in which Jacob dons furry goat skins to pretend to be his hairy brother Esau, and Isaac, who can no longer see in his old age, grows perplexed:

בראשית כז:כב וַיֵּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אֶל יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיִּמָּשְׁהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲקֵל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדִים יְדֵי עֵשָׂו.

Gen 27:22 So Jacob drew close to his father Isaac, who felt him and wondered. “The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau.”

The Jerusalem Talmud suggests that Isaac’s statement alludes to the pain that Esau’s descendants will cause Jacob’s descendants (j. *Ta’anit* 4:8, 68d):

תני אמר רבי יהודה בי רבי אלעאי ברוך רבי היה דורש הקול קול יעקב והידים ידי עשו קולו של יעקב צווח ממה שעשו לו ידיו של עשו בביתר

It was taught: Rabbi Yehudah bei Rabbi Ilai Baruch said: “Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi] used to offer this homily: ‘The voice is the voice of Jacob but the hands are the hands of Esau’ (Gen 27:22): The voice is the voice of Jacob crying out because of what the hands of Esau did to him at Beitar.”

This passage refers to the catastrophic conflict between Rome and the people of Judea which took place in 132–135 C.E., popularly known as the Bar Kokhba rebellion after the Jewish leader, Simeon Bar Kokhba.

This war resulted in the Romans razing Jerusalem to the ground, and the destruction of the city of Beitar, where the Romans believed leaders of the rebellion were stationed. In referencing Beitar’s destruction, this Talmudic legend clearly associates the Roman Empire with Esau, and presents Jews and Romans as eternal antagonists.

Hadrian King of Edom

Midrash Tanchuma (mid 1st millennium C.E.) takes this a step further, and connects Edom with the Emperor Hadrian, who put down the Bar Kokhba revolt (Warsaw ed., *Bereishit* 7):

אנדריאנוס **מלך אדום** כיון שכבש את העולם כולו הלך לו לרומי אמר לבני פלטרין שלו מבקש אני מכם שתעשו אותי אלוה שהרי כבשתי את כל העולם אמרו לו עדיין לא שלטת בעירו ובביתו, הלך והספיקו בידו והחריב בית המקדש והגלה את ישראל וחזר לרומי, אמר להם כבר החרבתי ביתו ושרפתי היכלו והגל[ת] עמו עשו אותי אלוה.

After Hadrian, **king of Edom** conquered the world, he returned to Rome and said to his officers: "I want you to make me a god, since I have conquered the world." They said to him: "But you have not yet established your rule over his (God's) city and his house." He went, succeeded, destroyed the Temple, exiled Israel, and returned to Rome. He said to them: "I have now destroyed his house and burned his Temple and exiled his people. Make me a god."

Tanchuma here conflates the Great Rebellion against Rome, which led to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., with the Bar Kokhba Rebellion sixty years later, and thus makes Hadrian—not Vespasian or Titus—the destroyer of the Temple.

Putting history aside, however, we can see how this midrash makes the most powerful nation in the world into one that fears, or at least respects, the God of Israel. Moreover, Hadrian's subordinates in this story see the "real" battle in this world as one between Rome and Judah, i.e., between Esau and Jacob.

A midrash, found in *Genesis Rabbah* (mid-first millennium C.E.), also connects Emperor Hadrian with Esau (*Gen. Rab.* 63:7, Theodor-Albeck ed.):

שני גוים בבטן שני גאי גוים בבטן זה מתגאה בעולמו [וזה מתגאה בעולמו, זה מתגאה במלכותו]^[6] וזה מתגאה במלכותו

"Two nations (*goyim*) are in your womb" – Two proud (*geyim*) nations are in your womb,^[7] this one is proud of his world [and that one is proud of his world; this one is proud of his kingdom] and that one is proud of his kingdom.

שני גיאי גוים בבטן אדריינוס באומות ושלמה בישראל

Two prides of their nations are in your womb – Hadrian amongst the gentiles and Solomon amongst the Israelites.

This midrash identifies the two nations in Rebekah's womb with Solomon (10th cent. B.C.E.) and Hadrian (2nd cent. C.E.), two great rulers of Rome and Israel respectively. These two rulers were not

contemporaries, of course, but each represents his respective kingdom at its most expanded, powerful moment.

Hated Nations

Genesis Rabbah continues this midrash with a different reading, suggesting that these are two hated nations:

שני שנאי גוים בבטןך כל האומות שונאין את עשו וכל האומות שונאין את ישראל

Two hated of nations are in your womb – all of the world's nations hate Esau and all of the world's nations hate Israel.

שנאיהון דבנייא במעיך שנ' ואת עשו שנאתי וגו' (מלאכי א ג)

The most hated of [God's] sons is in your womb, as it says (Mal 1:3), "But Esau I have hated..."

Although Rebekah's twin sons are both progenitors of the two nations most hated by other nations, only one of the sons is also hated by God. The midrash here makes use of the same verse from Malachi used by Paul in Romans: God hates Esau, says the prophet Malachi, but in this case, Esau is not a code for Paul's opponents but for the Roman Empire.

Antoninus and the Place of Edomites in the World to Come

The metaphor of Rome as Esau was not limited to Hadrian or even to Romans who antagonized the rabbis. Even those Roman officials who were beloved by the rabbis are still spoken of as descendants of Esau in rabbinic literature. According to one Talmudic legend, for instance, Antoninus, probably a loose reference to Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius,^[8] worries that as a descendant of Esau, he will not be saved (b. *Avodah Zarah* 10b, trans. Sefaria with adjustments):

אמר ליה: אתינא לעלמא דאתי?

[Antoninus] said to [Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi]: "Will I enter the World-to-Come?"

אמר ליה: אין.

[Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi] said to him: "Yes."

אמר ליה: והכתיב: לא יהיה שריד לבית עשו!

[Antoninus] said to him: But isn't it written: "And there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau" (Obadiah 1:18)?

בעושה מעשה עשו.

[Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi answered]: “[This refers to] those who behave like Esau.

In this legend, Antoninus identifies himself as a descendant of Esau and expresses his concern to Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi that this will block his entry into the World to Come, since he reads the verse like the rabbis, that eradication of descendants refers to the next world (i.e., messianic times). Rabbi Yehudah assures Antoninus that this prediction applies only to descendants of Esau who act in the sinful manner of Esau, and does not apply to Esau’s righteous descendants.

Herod and the Origins of the Edom-Rome Connection

Why do the Rabbis associate Rome, a powerful city in Italy which ruled the entire Mediterranean world from the late 1st cent. B.C.E. to the late 5th cent. C.E., with Edom, a small province southeast of Judea, which didn’t even rule itself? The connection likely derives from historical events associated with Herod the Great.

As noted above, in the late second century B.C.E., John Hyrcanus conquered Idumea, making it a part of Judea, and forced its inhabitants to become Jewish. Eventually, one Idumean convert named Antipater succeeded in becoming an important advisor to the high priest Hyrcanus (grandson of John Hyrcanus). Later, Antipater’s own son, Herod, married into this priestly family and became king of Judea.

Herod had strong ties with Roman officials, and a deep-seated ambition to rise in the ranks of Roman government. He was notoriously capricious and paranoid, killing off all surviving members of the Hasmonean family who presented potential royal competition, including his wife’s 17-year old brother, Aristobulus, whom he had drowned at a party. Herod would later kill his wife, Mariamne, as well, in addition to her mother and other family members.

Under Herod, Judea was a client state of Rome, maintaining a loose form of independence. This status of client state dissolved shortly after Herod’s death in 4 B.C.E., when Judea was incorporated into the Empire in 6 C.E.^[9] But Herod’s reputation as a cruel tyrant endured in rabbinic texts, and the rabbis associated the tragedy of the Roman takeover of Judea directly with Herod.

Herod as “Roman”

Despite his official status as a Jewish descendant of converts, for the Rabbis, Herod was not a Jew, but the archetypal Roman, who occupied Jewish land, imposed his values upon the populace by force,

and ruthlessly killed his enemies.^[10] The rabbis detested him, associating him with other unstable rulers whose cruelty would become the hallmark of their ruling governments, such as Caligula and Nero.

Many Jews thought of Herod as being in league with Rome, and indeed his great-grandchildren Agrippa II and Berenice opposed the Great Rebellion, decades after Herod's death.^[11]

The Rabbis' knowledge of Herod's Idumean ancestry made it natural to connect this "Roman" ruler, and by extension, Romans in general, with the people of Edom. And since Rome was the great power in the region throughout the rabbinic period, and the Romans destroyed the Temple and the polity of Judea, it was natural to apply the "us-them" narrative of Esau and Jacob to the us-them reality of Rome and the Jews.

The complex relationship that Israel had with Edom in the Hebrew Bible correlated well with the complex relationship that the Jews in the early rabbinic period had with Rome: while some Jews admired aspects of Roman culture, other Jews saw Rome as a powerful, looming force that had the potential to cause massive destruction to the Jewish community. Most Jews probably held both views, admiring Roman culture but fearing it at the same time.

But the Herod/Edom connection is not the whole story.

Reversing the Christian Esau-Jacob Metaphor

During Herod's time, and on through the destruction of the Temple and the putting down of the Bar Kokhba rebellion, Rome was polytheistic, worshipping Jupiter and other Roman deities. When the rabbis were writing their midrashim about Rome being Edom, however, Rome was already Christian. Moreover, Paul's allegory and its application to Jews would likely have been familiar to the rabbis both in Israel and Babylon, who lived amongst Christians.

It would seem that part of the rabbinic identification of Rome with Esau was in response to the Christian claim that Esau is the spiritual ancestor of the Jews. In other words, although the rabbis explicitly connect Esau with pagan Rome, referring to Hadrian and Antoninus, the destruction of the Temple, and the quashed Bar Kokhba rebellion, they likely have Christian Rome in mind as well.

Once the Roman Empire legalized Christianity in the fourth century and adopted Christianity as its official religion, Edom became a cipher not just for the political entity Rome, but for the religious

entity Christianity. Such an understanding of Esau and Edom would have been a particularly sharp and effective polemical counter-reading to that of Paul and the Church Fathers.

Hidden Anti-Christian Polemic

Thus, when Antoninus says to Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi that he is afraid he will never be allowed into the world to come because the prophet Obadiah has declared that “no descendant of Esau will remain,” the rabbis are saying that Christians will not be allowed into the world to come, though some righteous “Romans” who are good to the Jews can be saved. Even though Antoninus lived before Christianity became the official religion of Rome, and the historical Antoninus Pius was not a Christian himself, the Jewish readers of the Bavli know what Rome symbolizes.

Similarly, when *Genesis Rabbah* quotes the verse that “God hates Esau,” immediately following the midrash that the prophecy about Esau refers to Emperor Hadrian, the rabbinic authors are polemicizing against Paul’s use of this same verse in Romans. God hates Esau means that God hates Romans, and by extension, the rabbis are saying that the verse means that God hates Christians. Again, even though Hadrian lived before Rome became Christian and was not himself a Christian, Jewish readers of *Genesis Rabbah* know what Rome symbolizes.

Explicit Polemic in Medieval Times

This implicit polemic eventually becomes explicit in the medieval Jewish commentators, who use Edom as a cipher for Christianity without the veneer of Pagan Rome. For example, a prophecy about the destruction of Edom appears in Isaiah 63:1, which begins when the prophet sees a vision of a man (or a being) with stained garments:

יְשַׁעְיָה סִבֵּא
מִי זֶה בָּא מֵאֶדוֹם חֲמוֹץ בְּגָדִים מְבֻצָּרָה זֶה הַדּוֹר בְּלִבוֹשׁ צָעָה בָּרֹב
כֹּחַ...

Isa 63:1 Who is this coming from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah — Who is this, majestic in attire, Pressing forward in His great might?...

Asked why his garments are so red, he answers that it is because he has been trampling people in his rage and their blood has splattered on his clothing. In his gloss on this verse, Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–c.1167) writes that the being is God himself,

והטעם על הגזרה שגזר על אדום, וזאת היא מלכות רומא וקוסטנטינא, ... ונקראו אדומים בעבור שנכנסו בתורת אדום, וזאת התורה נקראה על שם אדום, שהאדומיים האמינו בתחילה בתורת האיש הידוע:

...And the reason is because of the decree he made against Edom—this is a reference to Rome and Constantinople. And they are called Edomites because they joined with the teachings of Edom (Christianity). And this teaching is called “Edomite” because the Idumeans were the first to believe in the teachings of the well-known man (Jesus).

Putting aside his dubious historical claim about early Idumean embracing of Christianity, ibn Ezra’s point is that “Edomite” is first and foremost a cipher for the “Christian” religion and only by extension a reference to Rome, who adopted this religion.^[12]

Another Way to Look at this Polemic

Readers of the midrashic texts quoted above might assume that the rabbinic association of Esau with Rome points to God’s unequivocal rejection of Rome and Christianity. Just as Esau was the rejected son who received no covenantal inheritance from God, so too were Rome and Christianity rejected by God in favor of a relationship with Israel. But if the rabbis meant to suggest that Rome and Christianity deserved nothing but scorn and rejection, it would have made more sense to associate them with antagonists who had no familial relationship with Israel.

The reference to Rome and Christianity as Esau thus indicates that Rome, and even more powerfully, Christianity, is a sibling to Judaism. While according to the Rabbis, God may have no covenantal relationship with Rome and Christianity, the Jews have an unavoidable theological “sibling” relationship with Rome and Christianity, whether they want it or not.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the rabbinic association of Esau with Rome and Christianity is that when we last see Esau in the Hebrew Bible, he has reconciled with his brother Jacob, and they live near one another, if not among one another, in peace.

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